

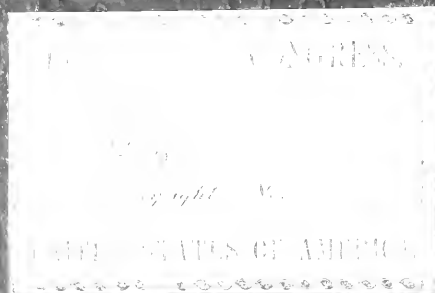
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Frontispiece.

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THE

LITTLE BLIND GIRL

OF NORMANDIE.

And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them.—ISAIAH, XLII. 16.

New York:

ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & CO.,

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The Little Blind Girl.

THERE lived in sunny Normandie
(And still lives it may be)
A little orphan peasant girl,
Blind from her infancy.

She and her grandsire, old and poor,
Together lived alone;
But ever round their simple lives
A sweet contentment shone.

The old man could no longer work,
And so to earn their bread
The little maid in braiding straw
Her busy fingers sped.

The grandsire dearly loved the child,
And every market day
Her little hand would clasp in his
And lead her in the way;

Up to the busy village near;
Where having sold her braid
Her palm, with all its little gains,
Once more in his was laid,

And murmuring many a word of love
And cheer and childish thought,
Peace shining round them as they went,
Their simple home they sought.



And often would the old man say,
As hand to hand was pressed,
“Ah! who will guide my little one
When I am gone to rest?”

And then the little child would tell,
In story or in song,
Of Him, who “leads by waters still,
The tender lambs along.”

Of Him, who sent the ravens down
And the good prophet fed;
Who numbered too, each golden hair
Upon her childish head.

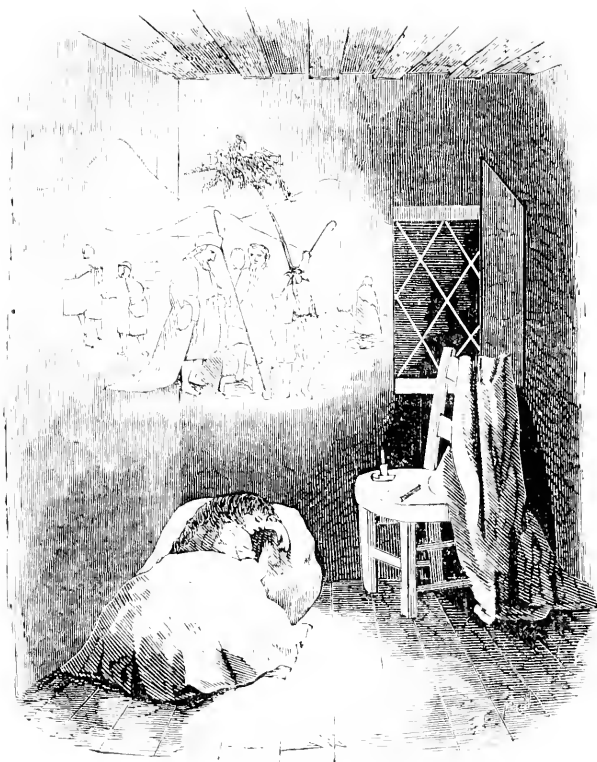
For though unlearned and ignorant
Of simplest worldly lore,
Yet often in long summer eves
Beside the cottage door



The fond old man would picture her
From out the Holy page,
The sweet and tender stories, there,
Of childhood and of age.

And so inwrought upon her mind
These Bible legends were,
That like an actual, present life,
Became each character.

Oft in her little bed at night
She thought them o'er and o'er,
And dreaming, smiled as at old friends
To see them come once more.





And so the child within whose lids
No ray of sunlight shone,
Hearing but seldom human voice
Save the old man's alone,

Grew up within a fairer light
Than shone on flower or tree,
Grew up alone—yet in the midst
Of goodly company—

Bright in her sky, there ever shone
The sun of Eastern skies;
From waving palm, she felt the breeze
That fanned her sightless eyes.

And there, beneath their cooling shade
The old man she could see
Sitting, like patriarch of old,
Beside the low roof-tree.

And as round Abraham's tented door
Stood Angels unaware,
So round the maiden's cottage porch
Thronged many a vision fair.

Here, when the sun shone warm at noon,
The good old man had told,
How once a little harmless lad
Was by his brethren sold.

And there, as in a frame-work stood,
Those brethren's cruel sin
With Joseph and his stacks of corn,
And little Benjamin.

And in the casement, as the sounds
Of reaping songs went by,
The maiden, from the rustling sheaves,
Saw Ruth look smilingly.

She saw not at the eventide
The tender twilight skies,
But thought how "at the close of day
God walked in Paradise."

She could not tell, what flocks of sheep
 Browsed in the meadow near;
But as their softly tinkling bells
 Stole faintly on the ear,

There rose before her, far outstretched,
 A fair Chaldean plain,
And on it shepherds standing mute
 To hear a heavenly strain.

And there a gentle shepherd stood;
 Clear in her inner sight,
Full well she felt, that of her world
 He was indeed the "Light."

And as those low sheep bells, she thought,
Though faint and far away,
Will bring the careful shepherd back
Before the close of day,

So feeble call or prayer of mine,
A sightless lamb forlorn,
Will find me at my Savior's side
Or on His bosom borne.

And so the little blind girl lived—
And those two, poor and lone,
Dwelt in a pure and inner life,
That they had made their own.

It happened, that one summer morn
Before the cottage door,
There stood a stranger, lately come
From far and foreign shore,

And from the blind of other lands
He had been sent, he said,
That by a new and wond'rous mode
God's Gospel might be spread.

Within his hand a volume lay—
And turning to the maid
And placing it upon her arms
In gentle tones, he said,



“This is the book of God, dear child,
And often we have heard,
How faithfully thy little heart
Has kept each sacred word.

“But God, who to the tender lamb
Has tempered the rough wind,
Who laid the shadows on thine eyes,
Has not forgot His blind.

“And as for darkened Israel
He wrote on Sinai's stone,
So, for all sightless eyes like thine,
His teachings here are shown.”

Firmly, above the letters raised
He placed the maiden's hand,
And pressed it gently on the page,
And made her understand

How to the blind man eyes were found,
And how a gracious Heaven
Had ordered, that for one lost sense,
Another should be given.

He had brought her the Book, he said,
A precious, gift indeed,
That all which others told to her
She for herself might read.

When with a firm and practised touch
Each letter she had guessed,
The stranger was to come again,
And teach her all the rest.

And then the good man went his way
And left the sacred book,
Which to her heart the happy child
In speechless rapture took.

It was the dream of all her life,
The one fond vision bright,
For which, and but for which alone,
She e'er had missed the light.

'Twas not enough to listen near
The harp which David played,
But she, herself, would touch the strings,
And learn the sounds they made.

To read herself those precious words
That so much joy had given ;
To read them, too, to other blind,
And lead them so to Heaven,

And had God heard her unbreathed prayer ?
Could He before her lay—
Within her very fingers grasp—
The Life, the Truth, the Way ?

And then before her solemnly
The Holy Book she placed,
And with a timid trembling touch
The moulded letters traced.



Alas! alas! poor little one!

The busy fingers used
So hardly on her coarse straw work,
All sense of touch refused.

In vain she tried them o'er and o'er,
And still anew begun ;
It was her first great grief in life ;
A harsh and bitter one.

At length there came a happy thought
Across the maiden's brain,
And with a sharp and glittering blade,
Without a thought of pain,

She gashed each hardened finger's end
And left it bleeding fast,
Thinking, that now made sensitive,
The touch must come at last.

It was indeed a piteous sight,
To see the poor blind child,
Her little fingers dropping blood,
Yet every nerve stretched wild,

Her very breath held tightly fast,
Each muscle strained intense,
The pausing pulses seeming stilled,
For the one missing sense.

Alas! nought but a sick'ning pain
Followed the bleeding touch,
Poor child! her little bleeding heart
Was bleeding full as much.

And now all fruitless was the pain;
Until the wounds could heal
Who was to braid and sell the straw
That earned their simple meal?

Ah, happier had it been, she thought,
Instead of now like this,
Still to have lived in ignorance,
And ne'er dreamed of such bliss.

While yet her tears streamed down afresh,
Heart-broken, bitter tears,
A well known touch is on her arm,
A loved voice in her ears.

And in the old man's withered hands
The poor torn fingers rest;
And gently upon locks of snow
The golden curls are pressed.

And as he stanch'd the bleeding wounds,
And kissed them o'er and o'er,
He whispered "Come, dear little one,
And walk with me once more,

“High upon Olive’s shaded mount,
And say, if thou can’st see
Those bitter heart-wrung drops that fell
In sad Gethsemane?

“By that pure brow on which they stood,
Kneel thou, dear child, with me,
And lay thy little grief by His
Who died on Calvary.

“And still thy heavy sobbing breath,
And slowly, word for word,
Make thou the prayer that there He made,
And thou, too, shalt be heard.”

The child knelt down with looks serene,
And by the old man's knee,
Clasping the holy tear-stained Book,
She whispered solemnly—



“Father, Oh! hear Thy sightless child
As Thou didst hear Thy Son;
Let not the will of my weak heart,
But Thine, O God, be done.”

Then she arose, the little maid,
And on her brow so clear
There, dwelt a look of such sweet peace
It seemed as though anear,

The angel, whom that prayer had brought
To lone Gethsemane,
Now stood, to soothe her stricken heart,
And calm her misery.

And now mark well God's graciousness,

And in what mystic ways

Love works out all its promises,

And Faith its power displays.

The maiden gently put aside

The stranger's precious Book,

And with a *kiss* upon its leaves,

A last farewell she took.

"I may not keep thee," so she spake,

"Thou blessed Book divine,

Thou must be read by tenderer touch.

And happier hands than mine;

“But God knows best,” and once again

Her lips are on it pressed—

Why throbs so fast the little heart?

What stirs the heaving breast?



And why, as hour by hour goes by,
Yet stands the little maid,
Bright tears of joy within her eyes,
And still the soft lips laid

Within the Book, upon whose leaves
From side to side they move,
As if, some happy secret there,
They o'er and o'er would prove.

And what this new-found secret was
In Normandie to-day,
No little lisping peasant child,
But could its meaning say.

For well they know the story there,
And still they love to tell
How God had blessed the little one,
Whose lips could read so well.

And how, as in their simple faith
Is fondly there believed,
By God's own whisper from the Book,
She all his words received.

How, too, to many a sorrowing home,
These words the maiden took,
And laid, upon each bleeding wound
Balm from the healing Book.

And when some crushed, heart-broken soul
Would murmur in its woe,
How, with her tender soothing words,
The little maid would go

And tell them of that wondrous love,
Whose mysteries are such,
That after kissing the harsh rod,
It blossoms 'neath our touch.

Then of her own sweet life she told—
And when her young heart sank,
How God had turned the bitter cup
To sweetness, as she drank.

And how, at parting, she would kneel,
And slow and softly there,
Would make them say with her the words
Of our Lord's simple prayer.

Yet always, so the peasants say,
As the low prayer arose,
Her voice at one place softened grew,
And the small palms would close,

As tho' some tender memory
A holier pause had won,
And God stood nearer, as she breathed
The words, "Thy will be done."

So did they humbly walk with God,
And when the time had come
To end the old man's pilgrimage,
And bear him safely home,

Dying, he felt no care for her,
But kissed her sightless eyes :
He knew that there was light for them
Waiting in Paradise.





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